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DEPT FOR EUR, VC, AND ISN; NSC FOR DAVID STEPHENS/JUDY
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SUBJECT: UKRAINE: ENGAGING UKRAINE ON MISSILE DEFENSE
PROPOSALS AND THE RUSSIAN REACTION

REF: STATE 21640

Classified By: Ambassador, Reason 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary: We passed reftel points and Missile Defense Agency (MDA) Director LTG Obering's powerpoint presentation to MOD and MFA officials February 26-28. Ambassador's February 21 conversation with Presidential adviser, preeminent Ukrainian strategic thinker, and former rocket scientist Volodymyr Horbulin provided a nuanced perspective on Ukrainian concerns of how the rollout of the proposed facilities in the Czech Republic and Poland play in Ukraine, even among sympathetic voices. Horbulin suggested the debate would be carried out in both the technical and political field, but political factors and Russian sensitivities would be the primary challenges to meet; he personally did not see how the two proposed installations would increase U.S. security and looked forward to U.S. explanations. PM Yanukovich has publicly expressed skepticism about the installations.

¶2. (C) Comment: The planned travel of a briefing team is timely and greatly appreciated by our Ukrainian counterparts. The audience for LTG Obering's March 13-14 visit to Kyiv will include Horbulin, Defense Minister Hrytsenko, DFM Khadohiy, National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) Secretary Haiduk, deputy Presidential Secretariat Head

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Oleksandr Chaliy, and PM Foreign Policy Adviser Konstantin Gryshchenko, as well as selected parliamentary deputies and the press. The Ukrainian NSDC's March 16 executive session, to be chaired by President Yushchenko with PM Yanukovich and all key security officials in attendance, is expected to examine and determine a Ukrainian position on the proposed missile defense installations. End Summary and Comment.

Interim information provided to MOD and MFA

¶3. (C) We delivered reftel points to First Deputy Defense Minister Leonid Polyakov and Ukrainian Military General Staff officials COL Sherstyuk, COL Somoylenko and Col Kozhevnykov February 26, and subsequently to MFA Arms Control Department Deputy Director Vasily Pokotilo, Counselor Oleksandr Bondarenko and Attache Marina Strogaya on February 28. Both Polyakov and Pokotilo welcomed the news that MDA Director LTG Obering and an MDA delegation would be visiting Kyiv March 13-14 to brief Ukrainian government officials further on U.S. plans to place missile defense facilities in Poland and Czech Republic. Pokotilo asked in particular that

Obering provide as much information as possible on the technical specifications of the planned systems. Polyakov regretted that the visit could not be scheduled earlier and noted that MoD and Embassy Kyiv would need to shoulder the public affairs burden of lowering the temperature around the missile defense issue in the meantime.

Horbulin's sympathetic but skeptical perspective

¶4. (C) Current Presidential Adviser Volodymyr Horbulin is probably Ukraine's best--some have said only--true strategic thinker. As the powerful Secretary of the National Security and Defense Council (NSDC) from 1996-99, Horbulin was considered by many to be the second most powerful person in Ukraine during President Kuchma's first term. Like Kuchma, Horbulin long worked at the Yuzhnoe/Pivdenne Missile Factory/Design Bureau which produced the Soviet Union's ICBMs; an engineer by training, Horbulin is the proverbial rocket scientist in addition to being an elder statesman actively in favor of Ukraine joining NATO. Ambassador solicited Horbulin's views on the public controversy over the proposed missile defense installations February 21.

¶5. (C) Horbulin stated that Ukrainian leaders lacked the objective information to form a position, gently criticizing the U.S. failure to consult with friends prior to making proposals public. He said that he was personally very well versed in the U.S. national missile defense strategy and developments after the U.S. withdrew from the ABM treaty. He noted that such plans initially had not foreseen placing facilities in central Europe, and European countries had ignored Russia's efforts to promote a possible European Missile Defense System under the name "EuroPro." He personally could see the development of the Iranian nuclear program, combined with the medium range missiles Iran possessed, as posing a danger to US forces/installations in Europe.

¶6. (C) Drawing on his design experience from Yuzhnoe, however, Horbulin dismissed claims that Iranian missiles could pose a threat to the U.S.; there was a 2600 km maximum range, "enough to bother Ms. Merkel in Berlin, but not Mr. Chirac in Paris." Even though the "Russians continued to work with the Iranians all the time," both on the Bushehr reactor as well as in military matters, Horbulin remained skeptical that Iranian missiles could reach the U.S. "This is my key question for U.S. officials: I simply do not see how these two stations strengthen U.S. security."

¶7. (C) Horbulin looked forward to precise technical information on the proposed installations in the Czech Republic and Poland. In the absence of angles and radar coverage, Horbulin felt the Russians would have a point that the radar could have coverage of Russian territory all the way to Moscow, even though "rational" people understood a radar station was not an offensive weapon and that ten missile interceptors meant nothing in the face of the Russian strategic arsenal. That said, the U.S. briefing delegation needed to be prepared to explain policy motivations, not just technical elements.

¶8. (C) Horbulin emphasized, however, that the main thrust of the Russian argument was political, not technical, dating back to presumptions, right or wrong, that Gorbachev had received assurances during the 4 2 talks over German reunification that there would not be any strategic installations placed on the territory of former Warsaw Pact countries near the Soviet Union and subsequently Russia. Horbulin felt that the Missile Defense proposal was the likely proximate trigger to Putin's outburst in Munich, foreshadowed by his similar comments about the proposed installations during his three hour press conference in Moscow prior to Wehrkunde.

¶9. (C) Horbulin personally dismissed the main public concern voiced in Ukraine: that the fallout from a potential

interceptor leaving a site in southern Poland to strike an Iranian missile would land in Ukraine. "This thesis is absurd to those who understand ballistics and kinetic energy;" the pieces would likely fall in Poland instead. But since politics would trump technical arguments, Horbulin suggested that the Poles and Czechs needed to engage their neighbors more actively as well as the U.S. in consultations.

(Note: We understand the Polish National Security Office plans to brief Ukrainian President Yushchenko during his March 7 visit to Poland.)

PM Yanukovych publicly skeptical

¶10. (SBU) PM Yanukovych reacted to media inquiries about the proposed installations when visiting Chernihiv province February 22 by saying: "We are certainly in a difficult situation. We are studying whether it poses a threat or, I would say, an inconvenience, to us. After we study this issue, we will take a final decision and determine the country's position on this issue." In Odesa on March 2, with regard to the discussions regarding the possible deployment of U.S. anti-missile defense system in Poland and the Czech Republic, the PM said "we have heard the 'compliments' between Russia and the United States, and and that was a vivid example of how not to go about doing things. This is insecure." The PM also told the press in Odesa that Ukraine wanted to get "as much information as possible" regarding the deployment, so the MDA team's visit is extremely timely.

¶11. (U) Visit Embassy Kyiv's classified website:
www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/kiev

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